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ABSTRACT

The 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires states to develop state improvement plans (SIPs) that include provisions supporting the professional development of all persons who work with disabled children. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education is establishing a professional development academy to offer a training curriculum and technical assistance that helps states meet the challenges of implementing SIP requirements. The academy will assist states to form partnerships across all agencies concerned with education, foster state infrastructures that support systems thinking, provide new knowledge and skills to state leaders, create networks and learning communities within state systems that promote high expectations for all learners, and provide technical assistance to participating state teams for sustained multiyear educational reform. The academy implementation plan consists of two training sessions per year for up to 10 state teams, with technical assistance provided during the second year. Through academy training sessions and sustained technical assistance, state teams will develop a written plan for immediate use, and the skills and knowledge needed for ongoing implementation of the systems change activities in their SIP. The academy curriculum has five content areas that reflect IDEA requirements. Purpose and themes are outlined for these areas: strategic thinking, leadership, organizational change, collaborative partnerships for professional development, and systems of accountability. (SV)

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COMING TOGETHER THROUGH COMPREHENSIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: KEY TO STATEWIDE IMPROVEMENT PLANS

FORMING A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACADEMY

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc. (NASDSE) promotes and supports education programs for students with disabilities in the United States and outlying areas. NASDSE is a not-for-profit corporation established in 1938. The membership and staff of NASDSE are committed to a performance-based educational system responsive to the needs of all children and youth, including those with disabilities.

A priority goal of NASDSE is to support education reform through systems change efforts resulting in improved educational systems for all children, with a strong focus on the inclusion of children with disabilities. To achieve this goal, NASDSE is establishing a substantial interagency cooperation through the "Professional Development Academy: Enhancing Collaborative Partnerships for Systems Change" to insure higher expectations, opportunities to achieve at higher standards, and positive educational outcome, for ALL children.

The Academy will build on NASDSE's ongoing leadership activities over the past five years which include:

- publication of *Leading and Managing for Performance: An Examination of Challenges Confronting Special Education*, which calls for major changes in the education of children with disabilities and for a partnership of special and general educators in educational reform;
- proposals for significant changes in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which emphasized the participation of children with disabilities in the general education curriculum and in broad based accountability programs;
- publication of NASDSE's *Vision for Balanced Accountability* which articulated a model of system accountability, individual student accountability, and input/process accountability;
- development of ongoing professional development programs including two Wingspread Conferences, supported by the Johnson Foundation, on different aspects of educational accountability; and
- implementation of a federally funded *Networking System for Training Education Professionals* professional development project.

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THE NEED FOR A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACADEMY

All across the country, initiatives are being formulated at state and local levels to reform education. In the development of the education reform agenda, it has often been unclear where special education fits in the bigger picture of systemic change. Twenty-five years of social and political policy has clearly affirmed the right of children with disabilities to be included in a system designed to provide a free public education for all children of all people. A significant set of issues remain with respect to the creation of a unified system of education which brings together the best practices of individualized education approaches developed through special education and the large majority of educational programs that have been generically described as general education. A fundamental system change is required to bring together the communities of special and general education for the increased benefits to all learners.

The call for educational systems to provide a talented, dedicated, well-prepared teacher for every learner poses a challenge for the ongoing professional development of educators. Clearly the demand for schools and teachers to perform at increasingly higher standards must be addressed through effective systems of personnel development which support the concepts of ongoing assessment of needs and continuous improvement of teaching. As Sparks (1997) asserts, high levels of learning for all students is at the center of what we do as educators. To support this goal, every student must be provided a competent teacher and every teacher must receive high quality preparation, ongoing professional learning, and other support. This brings forth an urgent need for sweeping reforms that create state education systems comprised of competent educators who ensure that all students develop to their full potential.

The Professional Development Academy training curriculum and technical assistance will assist states to think and plan systemically. The academy will help states as they establish and perpetuate substantial interagency, inter-institutional and interdisciplinary cooperation to insure higher expectations, opportunities to achieve at higher standards, and positive educational outcomes for ALL children. In attempting to implement the SIP requirements, enormous challenges will be faced by states and territories. Such major challenges include assisting state leaders to think systemically and to approach change more globally while forming a functioning, collaborative partnership in a collegial environment. These extraordinary challenges demonstrate a great need to create learning communities with the necessary knowledge and skills to increase the education outcomes for all children. From these challenges comes the opportunity to create the infrastructure necessary to support and sustain systemic thinking and collaborative partnerships. The academy's curriculum, training, and sustained consistent technical assistance will help states as they meet these challenges.

THE PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE ACADEMY

The purpose of the Academy is to assist states in the establishment and perpetuation of substantial interagency, inter-institutional, and interdisciplinary cooperation through the Professional Development Academy designed to insure systems change in support of educational reform. A substantial goal in support of this purpose is the creation of higher expectations, opportunities to achieve at higher standards, and positive educational outcomes for ALL children. These efforts are directed at the initiation and attainment of State Improvement Plan (SIP) requirements of the IDEA'97 Amendments (Part D, Section 653). The intent of these efforts is designed to assist state leaders to think systemically and approach educational reform more globally through achievement of the curriculum objectives which follow (See Table 1).

TABLE 1

Professional Development Academy: Enhancing Collaborative Partnerships for Systems Change

Objectives:

1. Form functioning/collaborative partnerships across all agencies concerned with the appropriate education of all learners.
2. Foster state infrastructures which support and sustain systems thinking and collaborative partnerships to enhance the education of all students, including those with disabilities.
3. Provide new knowledge, skills, and enhanced dispositions about leadership for best instructional ans assessment practices to state leaders, with priority for participation afforded to members of traditionally under-represented groups (i.e., racial minorities, women, individuals with disabilities, etc.) and aspiring state leaders.
4. Create networks and form learning communities within state systems to achieve high expectations for all learners through accommodations of existing assessment and curriculum.
5. Develop technical assistance systems to participating state teams for sustained educational reform supporting higher quality instruction over a multi-year commitment.

CONNECTIONS WITH IDEA '97, THE SIP, AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

The IDEA '97 re-authorization Parts B, C, and D of the Act emphasize the importance of personnel development, stating requirements and suggestions in order for states to play a supportive role in the professional development of all those who work with children with disabilities. The significance of professional development and expectations for in-depth, ongoing, and systemic change are clear. The need for high-quality professional development, with rigorous and relevant content, strategies for implementation, collaborative partnerships, and ongoing support creates the opportunity to develop a Statewide Improvement Plan (SIP) to meet expectations and demands.

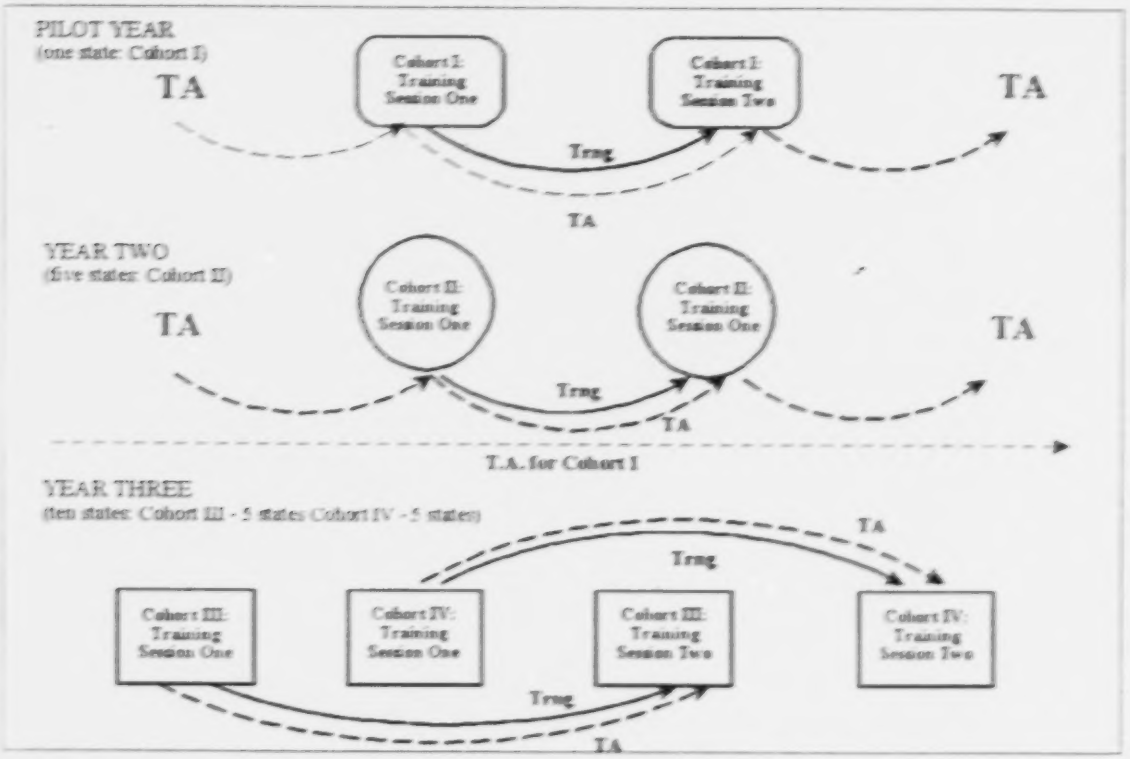
THE ACADEMY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The Academy will begin with a pilot year training one state team, made up of key personnel, with continued technical assistance for a second year. The second year of the Academy, a cohort of five states will complete two training sessions, with sustained technical assistance their second year. The third year, the Academy will begin the full cycle. Two cohorts (each cohort containing five state teams) will complete two training sessions, with sustained technical assistance their second year. (See Table 2). As the Academy continues, training will expand to two cohorts per year (bringing the total number of states trained per year to ten), with sustained technical assistance for the second year. Through Academy training sessions and sustained technical assistance, the state teams will have a written, collaboratively developed plan for immediate use, and the skills and knowledge needed for the ongoing implementation of the systems change activities in their SIP.

TABLE 2

Professional Development Academy: Enhancing Collaborative Partnerships for Systems Change

Training and Technical Assistance



THE ACADEMY'S CURRICULUM

The Academy's training is based on an integrated rigorous curriculum; contains research-based content; leads personnel through strategies for state-specific implementation; allows for ongoing support; and is driven by long-term technical assistance. Through the training process, opportunities for rural and small school educators, policy makers, administrators, teacher trainers, special educators, and parents to collaborate and form networks. The Academy director and assistant will gather pertinent data during an initial technical assistance meeting with the state team before the training sessions begin. The data collected will be used throughout both training sessions to reinforce, connect, and apply the session content with the needs of the state. During that time connections between the Academy curriculum, tasks to connect the training sessions with relevant state needs, and state commitment will be carefully examined by the state team.

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The Academy curriculum sections, which reflect IDEA '97 requirements and expectations, are organized around five content areas: Systems Thinking, Leadership, Organizational Change, Creating Collaborative Partnerships, and Systems of Accountability. Each curriculum area and purpose are listed in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Professional Development Academy: Enhancing Collaborative Partnerships for Systems Change

Curriculum Purpose and Content Outline

Section I: Strategic Thinking

Purpose: Individuals bring dynamic and innovative changes to their personal and professional lives as they apply strategic thinking to their repertoire of leadership options. Strategic thinking is the prerequisite to strategic planning and strategic action. With practice and experience, leaders and managers can move their organizations to think strategically and create the future they want for their organizations, markets, clients, or constituents. The "Strategic Thinking" Curriculum leads participants to think about how they think, reflect, and make choices, and to incorporate strategic thinking in their leadership styles.

Strategic Thinking Curriculum Outline:

1. Strategic Thinking as the Fundamental Basis for Change
2. Attributes of Strategists
3. A Comparison of Strategic and Non-Strategic Thinking
4. Thinking About How You Think
5. Strategic Thoughts for Making Changes in Your Own Life
6. Applications for Your Organization

Section II: Leadership

Purpose: The purpose of the "Leadership" Curriculum is to facilitate a system of leadership development which involves state teams in developing new and enhanced knowledge, skills, and dispositions as dynamic leaders who contribute as agents for systems change. Improved systems result in higher levels of educational attainment for all learners through the support of talented, creative, and well-prepared educators.

Leadership Curriculum Outline:

1. Theoretical Leadership Frameworks
2. Leadership versus Management
3. Change Process
4. Vision versus Mission
5. Leadership Effectiveness
6. Individual and System Accountability Through Leadership

Section III: Organizational Change

Purpose: The purpose of the "Organizational Change" Curriculum is to empower all levels of education practitioners within the state team as they explore and identify change strategies. These change strategies will result in enhancing the systems thinking as they develop learning communities. The core of these unique learning communities is centered on acknowledging, enhancing, and sustaining values and beliefs that ALL community members learn and contribute in many different ways. This training will positively affect personal, professional, and systemic change in educational organizations, as participants engage these tools in the process of implementing organizational change at the individual, small group, and systems levels.

Organization Change Curriculum Outline:

1. Organizational Change at the Personal Level
2. Organizational Change at the Team Level
3. Organizational Change at the Organization Level
4. Organizational Change at the Systems Level
5. Organizational Change at the Strategic Level

Section IV: Collaborative Partnerships for Personnel Development

Purpose: The "Collaborative Partnerships for Personnel Development" Curriculum will assist state teams as they work with all stakeholders in order to recognize, establish, and maintain collaborative partnerships. Collaborative partnerships depend on the right mix of leadership, support, resources, people and plan of action. This training focuses on how to incorporate the characteristics of successful partnerships and build collaborative teams at the state, local and regional levels.

Creating Collaborative Partnerships Curriculum Outline:

1. Definition and Facilitation of Effective Collaborative Partnerships
2. Identification of Needs and Resources of Potential Partners
3. Establishment and Maintenance of Collaborative Partnerships
4. Identification and Resolution of Common Challenges to Effective Collaborative Partnerships

Section V: Systems of Accountability

Purpose: The "Systems of Accountability" Curriculum, building on the report of the Wingspread Conference on Accountability, assists state teams in identifying and applying guiding principles for an inclusive accountability system. Shared responsibility between all state team members, shared responsibility between general and special educators, and an emphasis on building partnerships across service delivery systems helps state teams to emphasize an effective balanced accountability system.

Systems of Accountability Curriculum Outline:

1. Significance of Accountability in Education
2. Guiding Principles of an Inclusive Accountability System
3. Phases of an Inclusive Accountability System
4. Accountability for System Standards
5. Accountability for Inputs and Process
6. Barriers and Implications for State Teams

SUMMARY

The Statewide Improvement Plan (SIP) holds expectations high for personnel development as a part of the successful impact resulting in systemic change. Rural special educators benefit from the opportunities of networking and collaborating through the personnel development training expectations of the SIP. Training in leadership theory and practice for systems change, and ongoing technical assistance create opportunities for rural special educators to network and form learning communities. Access for all educators for professional development opportunities is imperative to successful implementation of the Statewide Improvement Plan. Professional development as a part of a system wide effort is the key to making this happen.

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